

WOODEN SPOIL

(Copyright, 1919, by George H. Dorn A. Co.)

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

CHAPTER VII.

"Look to Your Boom!"

Synopsis.—Hilary Askew, a young American, inherits from an uncle a hundred square miles of forest in Quebec. Upon taking possession, he discovers all sorts of queer things. Lamartine, his uncle's lawyer, tells him the property is comparatively worthless and tries to induce him to sell. Lafa, a Comell, the mill foreman, tells him his uncle has been systematically robbed. Morris, the manager, is associated with the St. Marie company, a rival concern owned by Brousseau, the "boss" of the region. Madeleine, the beautiful daughter of Seigneur Rosny, original owner of Askew's land, is pursued by Brousseau, who has her in his power. The hero decides to stay and manage his property. He discovers Morris tampered with the Comell manager. He whips "Black" Pierre, foreman of a gang of Brousseau's men cutting on his land. He defies Brousseau. Leblanc, his boss jobber, deserts to the enemy. From Father Lucien Askew learns the story of Marie Dupont, daughter of the captain of a lumber schooner. The girl's mother, now dead, had been betrayed, and she herself is looked on askance and has few friends. Marie knows the name of her mother's betrayer, but has never revealed it to her father. Askew finds Madeleine Rosny hostile to him. Askew and Comell visit a St. Marie dance hall.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

Baptiste sprang at her, seized her by the sleeve of her dress, and tried to pull her from her seat. Hilary saw Nanette protesting angrily; he could not hear Baptiste's excited exclamations, but he heard faintly the scream that came from Marie's lips. At once there was a general movement toward the group. Some of the lumbermen intervened. Baptiste turned upon the girl with menacing fists. The little man was beside himself with fury. Then Simeon came waddling down the room with his ducklike shuffle, and took Baptiste by both arms. With slow but inexorable force he led him toward the door. It seemed almost as if Baptiste, struggling in vain and mouthing ineffectually, was in the grip of some machine, for the momentum of Simeon's movements was composed much more of bulk than of velocity. Amid the jeers of the crowd Baptiste was thrust from the door, and Simeon turned and waddled back into the room, where the dancing was in full swing once more.

Hilary saw Marie flying round in the arms of a gigantic woodsman. Baptiste, seated upon the step before the dance hall, was weeping pitifully. The little drama came home to Lafa with equal poignancy. Hilary saw that his eyes were blazing.

"We'll get that girl away from here," he said.

Lafa nodded, and the two went in. At first they were not recognized through the clouds of rolling smoke. It was Nanette who saw Hilary first. She

uttered a sharp exclamation and pointed toward him. At once the two found themselves under the fire of all eyes.

The news reached Simeon Duval as he was reaching up for a bottle in his closet, and he came puffing out and waddled toward Hilary, his pale-blue eyes fixed on him in malevolent scrutiny.

"El, Meestral Askew, you have a drink on me?" asked Simeon, holding out the bottle under Hilary's nose. The action was once a challenge and an overture, to be interpreted in either fashion, according to the hearer's inclination.

Hilary shook his head. "I don't drink, Simeon," he answered curtly. "You want to dance, then, eh? You want a lady to dance?"

"Not to play card, eh?" "Not tonight, Simeon."

"Then what the h— you come to my place for?" Simeon's blue eyes glared into Hilary's. In his younger days the man had been the bully of the lumber camps; still of great strength, he could have matched himself against any man, with the double exception of Black Pierre; but Hilary's exploit upon the latter had a restraining effect upon him.

"I've come to have a look at you, Simeon," said Hilary genially. "Well, you see me now, eh, Meestral Askew? What you think of me, eh?" retorted the dance-hall proprietor. "Maybe you like to look more, eh?"

"I think you're just about what I expected," Hilary answered. "I hear your brother is thinking of opening a hell like this one at St. Boniface."

The lumberman had begun to edge in about them. Sentiment, while running strongly against the intruder, was not angrily hostile. The men were eager to see how Hilary would bear himself against Simeon, and they hoped for some fun. Hilary saw among them the face of Simeon's brother Louis, who looked like a small model upon a lighter scale.

"My brother here. He speak for himself," Meestral Askew. He not afraid. You think, p'raps, because you thrash Black Pierre, you boss in St. Marie?"

"No, I don't. I wish I were," said Hilary. "If I were, Simeon, I should run you down to Quebec full right at the rear. But I'm boss in St. Boniface, and I'll break his head open and run him in afterward."

Few of those present understood his exact meaning, but an ominous growl showed that this declaration was appreciated at more or less its correct value. For a few moments the situation looked menacing. Hilary took the aggressive, as usual.

"Ah, Leblanc!" he called out. "How do you like your new job? I'm start-

ing in to cut out that limit you handed back to me. There's some good timber there, Leblanc."

Leblanc snarled and started forward, shaking his fist and muttering. However, he did not get through the press, and it is not probable that he tried very hard to do so.

"Well, that's about all, Simeon," Hilary called. "I just came in to look at your place and give your brother a friendly warning, because I never want to see you in a fight."

"My brother take care of himself. He ain't afraid of you," said Simeon, who kept as cool as Hilary. Hilary intuitively summed him up as the most dangerous of his opponents. "But I guess you ain't going like that, Meestral Askew," continued the woodsman.

"I ask you to have a drink on me an' you say no. Now you going to buy drinks all round, eh?"

Hilary laughed out loud. "Not for your crowd, Simeon," he answered.

Simeon planted his fat body heavily before him. "What you say? You buy drinks, eh?"

Hilary put his hands on Simeon's shoulders and pushed him bodily backward. Simeon, who was planted rather than stood, at first resisted as a tree might resist a gentle shove with the hand; but he could not resist the strength behind Hilary's shoulders, and he began to waver and toppling backward, landing, still rigid, upon the floor.

Some of the girls shrieked, and the lumbermen came surging forward toward Hilary and began to hustle them. Yet, knowing Hilary's reputation, they hesitated a moment before initiating hostilities; and that moment brought an unexpected interruption.

For a boy ran screaming in at the door, and what he cried startled the entire assemblage. Simeon, who had been struggling to keep his feet, was upon him in an instant. But before the crowd had recovered from its confusion two officers in the uniform of the revenue department came running in. They carried revolvers in their hands, and they pointed upon Simeon and had him at their mercy in an instant.

At once the whole scene was dissolved. Men and girls ran this way and that, a wildly flying, panicky mass. It was one thing to drink and brawl in St. Marie, but quite another to defy the revenue department, which patrolled the intervals, whose arms were very long.

Whether any one except Simeon was wanted in that particular place was never known, for it was all the officers could do to hold on to him, while the crowd started to disperse. Hilary, carrying Lafa and Hilary along with him, in the street they pulled themselves out of the crush and took refuge in an alley. All St. Marie was in a turmoil.

News of the raid had spread everywhere with lightning swiftness. Lights were being extinguished, liquor hidden away, lumbermen and girls were running in wild panic through the streets.

Suddenly they perceived Marie Dupont among the crowd. Her eyes were wide with fright, and she was struggling helplessly in the crowd, borne this way and that by the conflicting currents. Hilary forced his way toward her and dragged her into the alley. There she broke down; she fell upon her knees in the mud, rocking to and fro and moaning.

Hilary bent over her. Lafa saw that his face was stern. "I am going to take you home," he said.

She looked up at him piteously. She appeared to recognize him, but was too terrified to understand. He drew her to her feet and, with Lafa on the other side, they began to make their way quickly toward the beach by a narrow passage among the cottages.

But as they started Lafa looked back and saw wedged in the crowd behind him, Jean Baptiste. He had been trying to reach the girl, but it was impossible to move a foot in that struggling human torrent. He saw them, and his eyes were dilated with impotent fury. There was murder in them as they fell upon Hilary. Lafa shouted for help.

His impulse was to wait for the man, but he recognized that Baptiste was beyond all reason and self-control. He had misinterpreted Hilary's action; the only thing now was to elude him and get the girl away before Baptiste could follow. He was glad Hilary had not seen Baptiste. He meant to say nothing of it.

The three set out on their way. Marie at first sobbing and holding back, then gradually growing calm under Hilary's assurances, and at last going willingly. Her dress was dragged with mud, her fiery hair; she looked pitiful and frightened. Hilary felt a great wrath growing in him as he looked at her. At last they gained the shore road and presently reached Marie's cottage.

She felt in her dress for the key with shaking fingers. Hilary took it from her and opened the door. "Never go to that place again," he said sternly. "Let this be a lesson to you!"

She went inside. Lafa and Hilary waited till the lamp was lit and, through the torn shade, they saw Marie Dupont crouched before the stove, her face on her arms.

"I guess we'd better be going, Lafa," he said.

"She's had her lesson."

"I hope so. I've seen enough this evening, Lafa. It makes me sick to think that there are wretches vile enough to encourage this, for money or influence." He turned on him. "If I can trace Brousseau's hand in this work," he said, "heaven help him!"

Baptiste worked all the next Monday on the boom, fiercely and unsparring of himself or his men. Hilary, a little puzzled by the little man's sullen manner toward himself, attributed it to his personal distress at what had happened in St. Marie. He did not know that Baptiste was aware of his presence there, and felt happy in the consciousness that he had done him some service. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have seen his suit with Marie Dupont successful.

The strengthening of the boom was finished. The wooden structure had been immensely fortified with great trunks, lashed and nailed together, resting in concrete which had been molded into the crevices of the rocks on either side of the cutwater. Hilary examined and approved of the work. It seemed to remove all possibility of danger.

Everything depended on the first minute after the jam was broken. If the torrent could be carried off through the sluice gates, in the main the log would find an easy passage over the dam into the lake. But actually the reinforced boom seemed to resist the torrent without any likelihood of breakage.

The charge was to be exploded at three in the afternoon. That day Hilary was kept busy in his office, going over the pay roll in preparation for the October changes. Gangs of men had been returning from the south shore, and he had signed on a number. He was aware that some of the loggers' agents had been at work attempting to dissuade them; however, the men wanted work, and even Brousseau could not hire them and keep them idle upon his skeleton company at St. Marie. Hilary discovered that the St. Marie enterprise existed only upon that of St. Boniface, and like the parasite plant, withered when its prop and sustenance was withdrawn.

It was two o'clock by his watch when he pushed his papers aside and strolled up the path that led through the woods toward the gorge. Hilary had left St. Boniface behind him and was approaching the gorge, from which he could hear the shouts of the gang making preparations for the discharge, when he saw Madeleine Rosny riding along the road toward him.

She had evidently been to the St. Marie territory, and he suspected, on a visit to Brousseau. The path was narrow, with the descending bank of the wooded gorge on one hand and a steep, shelving ascent, overgrown with young spruce and pine, upon the other. Hilary drew to one side, to give the girl passage. He was watching the trotting horse, now swiftly nearing him, and wondering whether he ought to make any sign of recognition when he was almost thrown from his feet by a vibration of the ground, followed by a dull roar that grew into an infernal crescendo and rolled away underground in a prolonged reverberation. The charge had been exploded.

Hilary saw the horse rear, curvet, and then, maddened with fear, leap wildly forward. An instant later it became clear that it was no longer under control. The terrified animal bolted at full speed along the road toward him, while the girl pluckily kept her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

She was a practiced horsewoman, for none other could have kept her seat when the horse went rearing backward; but as amount of skill her seat and pulled with all her might, but unavailingly, on curb and snaffle.

this country for both of us. If you will let me help you up the bank, no doubt you can find your way home. I assure you that I have no intention of intruding on you further."

Hilary looked at him curiously, but said no more. He began to push his way through the crowd in the direction of the office. He had not invited Lafa to accompany him, but Lafa was at his elbow when he went in, followed him inside the room, and took a chair beside him.

"Suppose you let me assist you up the bank, Madeleine, before I answer your question. We can hardly discuss that matter here," said Hilary. She seemed to recover her self-possession. "There is no need to answer me," she replied scornfully. Nevertheless she permitted him to brush the dust from her skirt and to give her the girdle and staid broadsword upon the road again. Far away Hilary heard the crash of the logs, flung over the dam and shooting toward the boom. Madeleine Rosny turned and faced Hilary. "Well, monsieur?" she demanded.

"It is because I want you to be friends," he said. And he took the girl's hand frankly in his.

She let it lie there for a moment, gazing at him in astonishment and puzzlement. Then, to Hilary's surprise, he saw the look of fear come into her eyes again.

"It is too late," she whispered. "Surely not, mademoiselle. We have misunderstood each other, perhaps, but—"

"I tell you it is too late. Oh, why did you not come to me and say this before?" she cried, and suddenly broke into unrestrained sobbing. "I thought you were grasping and wicked, and I hated you. I wished you evil. Look at me now. No, let me go, monsieur! Look to your boom!"

And, snatching her hand away, she ran, still sobbing wildly, down the road, leaving Hilary staring after her in uncomfortable dismay.

He could not understand her meaning, though her last words still rang in his ears. He watched her as she fled from the trees like a hunted deer. She was out of his sight around the bend of the road almost in an instant, but he saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

Hilary heard the shouts of the workmen still more plainly, rising above the awful smashing of the logs. Then, his hand on the door, he saw Madeleine, a few moments later, he saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her. He saw her head and her hands outstretched in blind panic before her.

"I don't know. He set off the dynamite, and that ended his job. Why?"

"About him," said Lafa, still glancing at Hilary. "I was just made me see straight."

"Why, it was you made me see straight," said Hilary. "Now, Comell, we'll push things hard from this minute. We'll start in cutting along the river, and we'll float the logs right down stream to the mill, and we'll keep Dupont and his schooner coming and going till navigation closes, even if we make Riviere Roches look as bare as our bank account was looking just now. Baptiste will be worth a score when he understands."

He broke off suddenly, and the two men, struck by the same thought, looked at each other.

"Wonder why Baptiste went off as soon as he'd dynamited the jam," said Hilary.

He felt ashamed of his suspicious. Yet, remembering that day when

"We can ship six thousand cords by December first," said Lafa.

"Thirty-five thousand dollars—perhaps less."

He could get more out of those river bottoms than the Log of Life.

"And shut down in the middle of March."

"As far as I can see," Lafa blurted out, "you'll be about ten thousand shy, Mr. Askew, assuming things go fairly well. That's why I came to you. You see, it's like this. I've got nearly eight thousand in the First National bank at Shoenburyport, Mass. Clarice—Mrs. Comell, that is—wouldn't let me buy her a house on the installment plan last September. She said as I'd never know when we'd need the money, and if I couldn't pay up on time they'd get it away from us somehow, no matter what the contract said. It seemed mighty unreasonable to me, Mr. Askew, but I'm glad now—I sure am glad."

"Lafa," said Hilary, "are you crazy enough to suppose I'm going to take the money that you and Mrs. Comell have been saving up for a home, and put it into this bankrupt concern?"

"Oh, shucks!" said Lafa. "Why that ain't nothing. I guess I know a good thing when I see one. I'm loaning it to you, Mr. Askew, at—any rate you want to pay me."

"Lafa, you're a fool," said Hilary, trying to keep his voice steady. "I'm tempted. But I'm not going to take it."

"Then I guess I'll take the next boat home!" shouted Lafa. "I ain't going to work for a busted concern what's going to leave me stranded up here, and I'm not drawing a cent, and Clarice—my wife—and the kids in Shoenburyport. No, sir! You crazy that or I'll leave. It ain't no crazy as you think. I'll give me an interest in getting the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."

"Connell, you're a trump," said Hilary. "I'll take the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice will approve. And when the concern's on its own legs, you—why, you can raise my wages."